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Instructional Quality Commission (IQC)
State Board of Education (SBE), California

Re.: Draft of the History-Social Science Framework

Dear IQC Members:

I write this letter as the Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Riverside, as well as the holder of the Sikh Studies Endowed Chair. I understand that in California, the Instructional Quality Commission is currently reviewing a draft of the History-Social Science Framework. In this draft, Sikhism is mentioned in several different areas. During the last public comment period, HAF (Hindu American Foundation) as well as CAPEEM (California Parents for the Equalization of Educational Materials) requested that the Commission significantly alter or delete almost every one of those Sikh references in the Framework.

The textbooks on “World Religions” for undergraduate curriculum have already included “Sikhism” as the 5th largest organized religion in the world. There are eight endowed chairs in the field of Sikh Studies in North American universities. The efforts of HAF and CAPEEM reflect the right-wing Hindu conspiracy to assimilate Sikhism in their *Hindutva* ideology. What a shame that the self-proclaimed ‘tolerant’ HAF on its website cannot even tolerate the very mention of the words ‘Sikhs’ and ‘Sikhism’ in their comments. They want to completely erase them from the religious landscape of America.

I would like to urge the Commission not to take HAF or CAPEEM’s comments seriously in removing the references to Sikhism. These comments are baseless. Sikhs have been in California for more than a century now. They have suffered most because of racial prejudice and discriminatory policies. For instance, on Sunday morning, 5 August 2012, a gunman burst into the Sikh Gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin and opened fire, killing five men and one woman, ambushing one police officer and injuring three others. During an exchange of gunfire he eventually

died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head after he was shot by another police officer. The dominant narrative that has emerged in both media coverage and public discourse since then has been one of mistaken religious identity. It presumes that the killer, identified as a white supremacist named Wade Michael Page, may have shot the Sikhs because he ignorantly believed they were Muslim. To a certain extent, such a story line seems accurate because hundreds of times since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Sikhs have been the victims of such horrific attacks.

On 8 September 2012 California Governor Jerry Brown signed law protecting Sikhs and other ethnic groups from workplace bias: "This bill, AB 1964, makes it very clear that wearing any type of religious clothing or hairstyle, particularly such as Sikhs do, that that is protected by law and nobody can discriminate against you because of that." Brown told some 400 Sikhs and supporters at a rally of the North American Punjabi Association on the steps of the Capitol. He also signed SB 1540, which requires the state Board of Education to consider a new history framework for schools that the governor said will include "the role and contributions of the Sikh community in California" (McGreevy 2012). Brown reiterated that education can blunt hatred, prejudice and fatal misunderstandings, such as the massacre of Sikhs outside a Wisconsin temple.

I do not want to go into the details of Sikh contribution in California which, I am sure, Sikh organizations such as Sikh Coalition will be able to provide you in the form of their submissions. My only request to you is to keep in mind Governor Jerry Brown's promise to include "the role and contributions of the Sikh community in California" in the new History-Social Science Framework for schools in California.

Sincerely,



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